



Office of the City Manager

March 24, 2017

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: *DWR* Dee Williams-Ridley, City Manager

Subject: Berkeley Considers

Today, we will be launching a Council agenda-related topic for Berkeley Considers, an online forum sought by the Council's Open Government Subcommittee as a way to improve public engagement on selected Council Meeting items.

Council will receive additional data to help with decision making, while the tool potentially broadens the pool of those who participate at the Council level. Anyone with a cell phone can view and provide comments. The platform chosen through the RFP process, Peak Democracy, adapts to the size of a screen, regardless of whether it's a cell phone or a desktop computer. Staff will also be using Berkeley Considers.

Find it at www.cityofberkeley.info/considers.

Each user gets one comment – preventing individual users from taking over a comment string. Registered users' comments are publicly viewable by all. (The vendor does not share or sell user data.) To ensure that any individuals do not game the system, the vendor monitors 25 different data points. Comments are also monitored for civility to prevent comments such as hate speech, personal attacks or obscene material.

Unregistered comments on Council topics will be distributed to Council at the conclusion of the open period, which will be noon on the day of a Council meeting. Registered users can choose to be anonymous or have their name be viewable.

The process for creating and posting Council-related topics will be the following:

- The topic(s) will be chosen by the Agenda Committee.
- Staff will create a topic based on the language of the Agenda item's recommendation. The topic will close at noon on the day of the Council meeting.
- Registered comments will be viewable throughout the comment period.
- All registered and unregistered comments will be provided to Council as part of Supplemental Packet 2, which arrives the day of the meeting.

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Council will receive all comments as well as data on the percentage of people who supported or opposed an item. In addition, Council and the public can, at any time, view the portal, and assess comments. Among other things, Council can examine comments by Council district and anonymized demographic information.

Any users who have trouble using the platform can click on the “Help” tab to email Peak Democracy staff, who provide support seven days a week.

We will publicize each Council forum topic using our website, email and social media tools – which reach over 25,000 members of our community.

It’s important to note that online forums such as these are not social science, nor a scientific poll. But, as with public comment, Berkeley Considers is intended to provide Council with an additional data point to help in its decision making process.

cc: Senior Executive Team
Ann-Marie Hogan, City Auditor